

# Time Capsule

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Hello to the reader who happened upon this miniscule book drenched in criticism and activism. These pages are not happily laced, but laced by necessity with one person's awareness of this world. This world is a good one, but far from the best. These are eyes of privilege, a white, middle class male with a family accepting of his alternative characteristics, in a town that doesn't shun him for his traits. And if the eyes of privilege can see just how much there is to fix, then I think it should be within reason to hope that the whole world can open their eyes, too.

I am an activist and through poetry and other means, I hope to inform. The world we live in is a good one, but not the best one. I don't seek to change the world, not alone, anyway. This is a global life we live and I hope to open the eyes of whosoever digs up this small tome of commentary of the world as it is, or as it was when an observant, curious, and critical twenty-one year old penned it. It's a good world, but not the best one. I hope the reader's world is better and lament the reader whose world is worse.

If the reader is from the now of this writing, I hope that person, whatever race, gender, creed, nationality, class, education, age, or whatever other societal box holds that person, that they learn, question, get angry, act, communicate, and sympathize, not with me, but with the countless victims who suffered enough that a landlocked Lawrencian put pencil to paper and broadcast his heart and mind for the world, however small, to see. And the world is a good one, but certainly not the best.

I tell the story of the snapshot of this world my eyes could see, and as grim as it is, no photographer, no matter how skilled or ambitious, can take a comprehensive, detailed photograph of everything, no matter how small the world is. A single person's eyes cannot see all the problems or express them in a single manuscript, no matter how small the world is.

And the world *is* small and beautiful, good, but not the best. Certainly, though, our world is small. Our barriers are more synthetic than the bottle that holds your water. Those plastics form on a physical level; our barriers are often solely conceptual, and we can't make them real.

Instead of building these walls to differentiate, we should seek sameness, unify, and act together for change. I can hazard a guess about you, dear reader, you are hopefully curious, likely hopeful to see justice for everyone, and passionate about things important to

you: loud about what upsets you, active to change it, doting on your interests and willing to share.

I hope you share your response with everyone. I hope you break the barriers between the "us" and the "them" and let the world know that this is a good world, but not the best. It's not easy to stop "themifying" others, and it's an eternal, internal struggle to fight off the barriers. I'm not innocent, I still do it from time to time, but it's crucial to acting, unification. Alone we're left to our own devices. Together we are us; we are *all* of us.

And all of us are powerful, many of us alone, but united far more formidable. Woman, man, child, it doesn't matter, if you have something worth fighting for, I hope if and when the time comes, you fight for it. If you won't do it, who will? Don't surrender to the bystander effect. The ones all around you expect the same as you do, so meet their expectations, don't wait for someone else to meet yours.

This world is a good one, but not the best. There are many flaws, many concerns, many worries, far more than one could list alone. The list is ever changing, once one thing is fixed, eyes must be drawn to whatever else will follow in its wake. I feel obligated, for context's sake to list a few things that are worth knowing about my now, that you, the reader, may not have in your own.

At the time of writing this, there is still wetlands

in Lawrence, fracking is legal, Africa (pick a country) is struggling, Joseph Kony is still alive, we have had only one nonwhite president (still in office, running for reelection) and no female presidents in the United States. Gay marriage is legal in some states, but not all, some places have legalized bullying on behalf of religious beliefs, people are arguing a woman's right to choose, and a woman has to work nearly seventeen months to make a man's yearly salary. Further, certain groups argue against contraception, even in lands where HIV is rampant, the cover of People Magazine is more important to most than malaria, we still use gas powered cars, all unleaded or diesel, some hybrid, very few hydrogen and electric cars, leaders seem to fear solar and wind power, fuel for vehicles is around \$4 a gallon. These are just a few situations two American eyes see, and it's nowhere near comprehensive. I hope my children can see the wetlands, and I hope my wife, should I have one, makes as much as I do for the same work, and I hope there's a woman president, or a non-Christian president, or another nonwhite president, or even a nonpartisan president. I hope I live to see a day when most Americans don't consider socialist or communist inherently bad words, but rather just economic and political philosophies.

So I bury this time capsule in a pit of books, hoping that, one day, I, or someone else reads it. I hope

when it is read again, that things have changed and for the better. I hope that I, and others like me now and later stand up for what we hold dear and don't let intimidation or ignorance or apathy (worst of all, apathy,) be the loss of whatever we respect. Once things are taken, it is far more of a challenge to get them back than to fight to keep what we already have and love.

These are things to consider and I hope they are better off in your now than mine, but to make them that way, those of my now need to act on what hasn't yet improved, and preserve what is already improved, and those of your now need to do the same where necessary. This is a good world, but not the best. So I hope that one day a reader reads this from a *better* world, since best is asymptotal. Just because we can't reach the best world doesn't mean we can't be striving for something better.

So with that in mind, read these pages, and, carry with you in life, the idea that this world *is* a good one, just not the best.

## On My Poetics

Typically the way I write is based on a sudden awareness of a situation I want to bring to light for others. I typically will hear something that simply outrages me: the situation in the Niger River Delta, gay rights struggles, really, any injustice. I write in free verse most

often because it is where I feel comfortable, but also where I feel I can give the most merit to the things I have written.

I often start with a topic and develop a poem around it, usually it just comes as I write, though on occasion a particular line will stick out ("Even More Homeless" or "Never Seen The Night" for example) and I will try as hard as I can to develop something meaningful around it.

Sometimes I am inspired by things I read to create some form of homage (as in the case of the beautifully dilapidated visuals in Allen Ginsberg's Sunflower Sutra or the general tone of Amiri Baraka's writing.) Once I feel the inclination to write something, I tend to look at what it is I like about a piece or author and attempt to bring about that in something I write. The most successful example of that in my writing, I feel, is In Response To: Sunflower Sutra, and it is why I decided to keep that name.

I intend to inform people with my writing. I consider myself an activist, but I know that an important step in bringing about change is making people aware, and as such, I feel my poetry is a mechanism by which I can lead others to bring about change, instead of trying to change the world alone.

My entrance into the realm of writing poetry came about most prominently in my first year of college, when it was

a venting tool to express my frustration with my early years. Over time I became very opinionated about various forms of injustice in the world and realized just how useful my writing could be as a tool to spread awareness.

My style has definitely matured over the years, I went from poetry of general angst to poetry primarily centered around sociopolitical criticism. I have other styles of writing (such as the first section, in which I took a few stabs at writing visual poetry to varying levels of success,) but I favor sociopolitical commentary because I tend to feel like it has a chance to persuade someone to do something, as opposed to being more aesthetic.

This particular collection works doubly with the title *Time Capsule*, because it includes poetry spanning my entire time at the university, and also it works as a collection that, perhaps in a few years, maybe decades, I can look back on these writings and see how life is (hopefully) different, *for everyone*.

## Visual Poems

I open this series with a series of poetic images, the first of which is a visual of the world after we are gone. The poems that follow it are a three part "poetic comedy" which will display a trip from the place most disrupted by our hands to a place which has the least disruption. The last place is not absent of our interaction, but we work mostly in symbiosis with it. The visuals should display a place which is to be lamented for how it has been treated and as we leave the trilogy, the visuals shift to a place which is fairly close to a peaceful interaction with the environs that surround us.

The "poetic comedy" aspect comes from Dante's Divine Comedy; the first poem of the three (Potentially also titled Land of the Forgotten) is supposed to parallel Hell, and makes a few references to Dante's travels within; the second is supposed to refer to Purgatory (hence the judgment theme at the beginning); and the third is supposed to refer to Paradise (though I took liberty in saying that it is not a perfect place, as I am of the opinion nothing can be truly perfect.)

## The Abandoned

Crumbling concrete walls  
covered in cracks  
and murals from  
graffiti artists  
seek practice  
Tags, rags, and shopping  
bags, abandoned  
empty Krylon cans  
Tables and fixtures in  
disrepair, nature  
taking back man's  
attempt to control  
her.  
A bird's nest with three  
hungry chicks  
crying for  
breakfast.  
The only light in this three  
story edifice is  
natural light and  
burned out hanging  
lamps swinging in  
place by a gnawed  
power cord.  
Broken glass and rubble span  
the molding  
thatched and frayed  
nylon office  
carpet, damp from  
the rain leaking  
through the  
fragmented window.  
A dank, musty odor wafts  
through, the smell  
of runoff and  
compost.  
A fax machine in three pieces  
with the glass  
broken out roots  
itself into a  
powerless socket in  
the wall.  
Somehow still beautiful, even  
comforting to the  
right eyes.  
Something elegant about  
Nature's readoption  
of the stone, sand  
and metal that was  
so carelessly left  
to rot by those

that thought they  
 owned it.  
 The outside walls covered in  
 vines which  
 strangle the statue  
 on what was once a  
 lawn.  
 wind and sun have turned the  
 sign into a faded  
 and forgotten image  
 of the place this  
 used to be.  
 Scraps of leftover material  
 which cost too much  
 to reclaim and more  
 were scavenged by  
 buzzards and roots  
 and vines, a spool  
 of cable stands  
 tall and rusted  
 against what was a  
 garage wall.  
 The large lifting door half  
 opened and covered  
 in green and black  
 spray, windows  
 broken out, a  
 raccoon lazing  
 about in a leftover  
 cabinet, rusted,  
 with cracking  
 bubbled paint, bits  
 of fast food  
 rappers and old  
 cups of soda make a  
 bedding for the  
 creature in the  
 part way opened  
 apartment.  
 wildflowers overtake the  
 crumbling planters  
 and the occasional  
 tree shades the  
 land.

## In Response To: Sunflower Sutra

Manufactured corpses  
     scattered disrepair  
     shattered  
         alone  
     sullen  
         decaying  
 With tree root wires,  
     rebar  
         pipes  
     trunk of oil drums  
         leaves of scrap paper  
         and foil  
 Leaking batteries, a head of a  
     doll, a broken glass  
     I raise  
 Here's to you, the fallen,  
     forgotten  
 To you, returning to the soil  
     from whence you came  
 I raise this shattered glass to  
     your shattered  
     window, long dead  
     train car  
 No sign of natural life is seen,  
 save the uprooted, rotting husk  
     of a sunflower  
 The lone soldier of the natural  
     living,  
 destroyed by that which could  
     kill the nonliving  
 seatless chairs, broken  
     wheelbarrows,  
 busted cars crying shattered  
     glass tears from  
     their once glowing  
     eyes  
 The colors once vivid fade to  
     gray and rust and  
     black.

Farther from the center of Dis,  
     a Stygian flow of  
     motor oil and battery  
     acid,  
 Yet still so far less harsh, as  
     grass reclaims the  
     loosely-defined soil,  
 growing where it can (and maybe  
     shouldn't.)  
 A scrapped, upturned hood of a  
     truck turned  
     flowerpot as it fades  
     to red sand

Cavity filled teeth of a  
dilapidated, decaying  
babygrand lie in ones  
and twos on the  
ground

Memories of the dead past,  
old fallout shelter signs shot  
to pieces,  
fractured glass soda bottles,  
floorset wooden cathode ray  
screens sans glass  
rot, a home to  
termites  
old unloved garden tools wish  
for their youth,  
when they were something.  
Foundations they dug, yards they  
beautified,  
now a redbrown neckless head,  
nothing more  
Plenty of things don't know what  
they are anymore,  
compost and shredded scrap,  
dying undignified in heaps,  
mass graves uncovered.

Outward the upper tiers of Hell.  
Brave hungry birds risk  
poisoning and  
rats hide in old soup cans  
breeding rats and  
rats  
Roaches explore the wasteland,  
rotting food and old stained  
fliers,  
single gloves, shoes, and socks,  
dried tissues and antifreeze  
bottles.

To the vestibule, a wasp nest  
built on an old piece  
of plywood  
A Fox sniffs for scraps,  
bringing mechanically separated  
chicken to its kits,  
leaving the plastic doll with  
sauce-stained dress  
behind,  
only interesting to humans,  
or for teething cubs to find on  
their own.

## The Land of Judgment

Outward from the wasteland  
to the social realm  
where there are many "toos"  
His hair is too long  
Her dress is too short  
Her hair is too curly  
In some place, his skin is  
too dark

Too different  
Too conformist  
Too loud  
Too quiet  
Too smart  
Too dumb  
Too mean  
Too *nice*  
Too cool  
Too many piercings  
and a tattoo, too.  
Everyone has to break their  
back to get ahead

or lie  
or steal  
or cheat  
or threaten  
or hurt  
or lie  
or *lie*

It's all fair.  
The "fair" lie in a  
disadvantage.  
Those who would do things the  
"right" way get  
left behind

The lazy and selfish  
venerated

But there are  
The hard working  
The kind  
The "fair"  
Those who listen  
Those who want to help  
Apathy fought with passion  
A way to redeem oneself  
To escape and be purged.

## Past The Gates

Outside the walls  
It's dangerous  
There are many threats  
and few guarantees.  
No batteries  
No medicine  
It's cold  
It's hot  
No mass communication  
Not much love.  
But.  
Not much hate.  
A spectrum of colors with no  
paints or synthetic dyes.  
Music without music  
A menagerie left and right  
Large and small  
A wide choice of scenery  
A little slice of heaven  
Some can stay forever  
Many can't  
Most don't want to.  
There is evidence of the  
inside,  
a shred here,  
a scrap there,  
but for the most part, purged  
or integrated, the land with  
the leftovers  
Trunks consume bicycles  
Current events turn to soil  
Artificial mountains of  
abandoned shelters covered in  
natural moss and vines  
Organic  
It heals without aid  
Outside the walls.



## Excerpts from

### *See Then Now*

A project I've been working on after hearing a reading and having a conversation with the wonderful Jamaica Kincaid, *See Then Now* is a collection of poems which criticizes the present world by looking at the past. The first part (some of which is shown here) focuses on how some things have not changed as much as we would wish they had ("See then now,") the second on things that have changed for the worse ("I want to see then, now,") and the final on things I hope the future keeps from our time ("I hope they see, then, now.") I was inspired to write it after mishearing the title of her book *See Now Then* and I was filled with ideas and began writing.

#### See Then Now - Violence

killing in the name of  
religion  
race  
gender  
sexuality  
politics  
culture  
geography  
...

Maybe it'd be easier to list  
what isn't seen  
as worth killing  
for:

That said, it's still much of  
the same.

However many hundred,  
thousand, million  
years

we've been "sophisticated" we  
still fight

Not just kill  
Abuse  
Mame  
Wound  
Attack  
Hurt

Not just physically  
mentally  
socially  
emotionally  
economically

Not just then  
Now as well

So see then now  
See how we've changed  
See the wars  
the genocides  
the fights  
the arguments  
the blood, sweat, and  
tears

Not going to construction  
But destruction.

## See Then Now – Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Television screens spouting  
    newsclips still  
    play  
Statements by leaders or  
    those who want to  
    be  
Claiming some blight on  
    humankind  
Caused by those who  
    apparently "made up  
    their mind" to like  
Those of their own sex  
And  
"Women" who work as hard as  
    "men" are paid less  
    in 2012  
And  
People ogle strangely at  
    those who dress how  
    they choose, how  
    they feel  
If how they choose doesn't  
    meet up with  
    society's  
    predisposed  
    expectations  
Of how they should, a "man"  
    in a dress, a  
    "woman" dressed as  
    a "man"  
Decades after the Stonewall  
    Riots  
Does "woman" or a "man" have  
    any real individual  
    value? Or is it a  
    burqua  
Thrust on our shoulders to  
    limit our vision of  
    ourselves  
and others?  
See then now

we haven't changed in  
    message,  
only in subtlety.

where is the hit single where  
    a "man" confesses  
    "his" love to  
    another "man?"  
or "woman" likewise?  
"Women" are still shoppers or  
    nags or whores or  
    hags  
"Men" are still the  
    breadwinners or  
    slackers or studs  
    or professionals  
"Women" still nurses  
"Men" still doctors.

Some insist that men should  
    cloak emotion  
Or women should cook or clean  
    but *certainly* not  
    manage or lead.

Some insist that  
    heterosexuality is  
    the only "natural"  
    sexuality which is  
    both false and  
    irrelevant to any  
    value judgment they  
    would splice  
    thereto.

Some still talk of gayness or  
    gender  
    nonconformity as a  
    disease, mental or  
    even contagious,  
    even contagious  
    through a  
    television or  
    computer screen.

And there's a hostile,  
    caustic recoil

Some insist a "man" can't be  
    raped  
Or that "women" don't abuse  
Or that a "woman" who acts  
    "girly" is wrong

for not being  
something "she" may  
not comfortably be.

And there's hostile, toxic  
infighting

Those who would promote gay  
rights  
Exclude bisexuals  
Those who might promote gay  
and bisexual rights  
Exclude trans\* people  
They are seen as  
"complicating" the  
issue

*As if it were easy.*

### See Then Now - Nationalism

The disaster arguably still  
ongoing that was  
once called The  
Great War was  
Sparked by evergrowing  
national pride  
building to toxic  
rivalry.  
The archduke likely never  
expected he'd be  
world-famous as  
Little more than the  
catalyst, not by  
intent, mind you,  
of a decades-long  
disaster.  
Yet when I see a flag flying  
I smile and  
appreciate the

rewards of being  
American,  
We are not number one, I  
don't believe that  
as many do:  
There are those who would see  
it a crime to burn  
that banner in  
protest  
when nothing is more American  
than protesting the  
establishment;  
it's our history.  
People killing Iranian women  
with notes saying  
"go back to your  
country."  
Well, come to my world. A  
world of *our* world:  
I couldn't care  
less your homeland,  
You're from here to whatever  
degree here-ness  
unites, not  
divides.

But see then now?  
A soccer game can cause a  
riot  
A "foreigner" is seen as a  
threat to the home,  
not an opportunity  
for knowledge or  
friendship.  
A flag is a symbol whose sole  
purpose seems to be  
division  
A world that depends on  
globalism treats it  
like a necessary  
evil  
when it has such good  
intentions...  
what is better than us?  
However big that us  
may be?  
water is only a barrier if  
you see water as a  
barrier,  
Mountains only walls  
If you want to keep something  
out.

## See Then Now - Post/Colonialism

I see very little difference  
in meaning often,  
'twixt  
postcolonialism and  
its predecessor

Nigeria is still an  
extraction-based  
economy where the  
public is  
subjugated by the  
oppressive ruler,

Kenya the same.

Nary any recently "liberated"  
land shows much  
change in  
conditions, in fact  
it can be, in some  
ways

Destructive if there is no  
assistance from  
those nonresident.

Extraction without limits for  
"the better of the  
nation" does little  
for the masses and  
less for the  
individual.

So see then now, occupation  
from afar,

*miserydiseasestarvationviole  
nce*

And when the masses or the  
individuals have  
had enough, they're  
the bad ones:

For disrupting the  
established order  
of things

Shut up and take your place

Below the radar and feet of  
your masters.

Gas flares and indentured  
servitude

The king is not from afar but  
right in your very  
home

And he is far more

Ruthless

Than the former occupation

Ever was.

See Then Now –  
Apathy

way back when, some lands  
were isolationist,  
and the individuals  
likely didn't care  
about those far  
away

what happened in Norway  
probably wouldn't  
be in the  
conversation for  
someone in the USA,

They may not even know where  
Norway is.

So...

See then now

when in the USA have you  
heard about foreign  
politics?

On the news?

It's not like that  
everywhere.

I'm guilty as I write this,  
my lens is narrow,  
as well, but I'm  
aware of it.

We are a world; we are a  
global system.

There is no them unless you  
make one

So why don't we care about  
us?

we only care about the "me"s  
or, at most, a very  
local "us."

People are dying

The world is, in many ways,  
falling apart.

But we shrug and putt around  
in our SUVs

In our off-shored sweat shop  
tees

And think "well it's someone  
else's problem."

"They're so far away"

"It's their fault for not  
doing something  
about it."

Meanwhile we drive past  
homeless at home

who will "probably spend the  
money on booze"

Like you can blame them,

And do.

We drive past homeless at  
home

who "probably aren't even  
looking for a job,  
expecting *us* to  
take care of *them*."

And we never stop

To ask

If that's true

Simply

Because

we

Don't

Care.

## See Then Now - Exploitation

There was a time not so long ago  
where the workers had  
no say in the  
conditions in which  
they worked.

Someone may have "sold" their  
"soul to the company  
store" or been stuck  
in work situations  
with dangerous white  
phosphorous.

And there was little they could  
do.

There was a time when good  
medical care was for  
the wealthy and home  
remedies were for the  
rest of us.

Even now, though, to some  
bosses, the customer  
is always right

Even when they are wrong.

Even now, though, there are wage  
struggles while top  
level execs sit on a  
chair made of money  
on a floor made of  
money in a house made  
of money

Even now if you get ill you may  
have to travel miles  
out of your way

Because the local hospital

Is out of network for your  
insurance

See then now.

Little has changed

Life-sustaining pills cost  
unfathomable prices

Women still make less than men

Corporations are people, amoral  
people with wealthy,  
privileged heads  
making decisions for  
the body and  
environment

Extraction of chemicals  
underground poison  
water, land, plant,  
and animal

Corporations fund shoddy  
governments in poor  
countries to keep  
quiet anyone who  
decides "hey, I don't  
like suffering."

Everyone is of the "me first"  
mindset.

Everyone wants to "get" the  
other guy.

No one thinks about the other  
guy's situation as  
long as they can get  
ahead.

So sit down and take a look  
around

Because

Life

Is

Not

Easy

For

Anyone.

## See Then Now - One True Religionism

The Inquisition  
The Crusades  
Countless genocides west and east  
Killing  
Hating  
Dividing  
Greed  
Torture  
In the name of  
The one true religion

Whichever it may be.

But that's all in the past...  
Or not

See then now

Pickers saying who god hates  
What you can or can't do

Whether you believe or not

And they'll let you know just  
what's in store  
For you  
According to them  
Those humans  
Those fallible humans  
Know exactly  
What an omnipotent god  
An omniscient god  
Often a benevolent god  
Hates.

Disbelief in their gods  
Gives them the right  
In their heads  
To harass you  
To picket you  
To spit at your feet  
For being different

Faith interferes and inflicts  
itself  
On science  
Placing road blocks on proper  
education for  
Your children  
Your doctors

On a subject we can't truly know  
If there even is a god  
What could mere humans ever know  
About her or his (if such terms  
even mean anything)  
will?

# Excerpts from Life Is Beautiful

## Picking The Brain of the Insane

Life Is Beautiful: Picking The Brain of the Insane is my earliest, and longest running project at this point. It intends to be a larger book than the others, and is a collection of sociopolitical, philosophical, and various other topics of poetry, essays, and prose which intends to span a broad range of ideas, genera, and topics while still staying within my personality and overall style.

## Embers

The leaves fall like embers  
and I am seared.

Gas-choked rivers glow from  
everburning flames.

The air of sulfur and  
hydrocarbon  
cocktail

Lead in the food, lead in the  
water

All is gray and black and  
fiery oranges and  
yellows, and reds  
of blood and flame  
alike.

Pacifists pushing for change  
for rights  
for medicine  
for *anything*

Sawed to pieces by automatic  
weapons  
Or strung over a bar by a  
rope



Native creatures and plants	government
rotting in piles of	oppression and
soiled compost and	Assure their shareholders
char and settled	that consumers
smoke.	won't know a thing
where plants till <i>can grow</i>	Assure the consumers that
foreign noxious	things are
plants thrive and	humane
animals infest.	murders
A stench of death and smoke	humane
and gas and pain	poisoning
and gas and blood	humane
and gas as it	abuse
chokes.	humane
The leaves fall like embers	malnutrition
and I am seared.	humane
Another day another dozen	forced poverty
dead for a dollar.	humane
Another night, a child with a	discrimination
fever that could be	humane
cured if the	back room deals
parents had the	Nothing to see here.
money.	The spines of the trees crack
The cover-ups as big names	and the soldier
with big bright	woods fall.
logos fund	

The troops roll in as the  
ground shifts  
beneath their feet.  
They make off with their  
spoils and leave a  
sore and empty  
landscape.  
The skies weep at the  
bloodshed,  
watershed for the  
wood shed in the  
back yard of the  
wealthy couple six  
thousand miles  
away.  
The people stood their ground  
but voices are only  
heard if ears are  
listening.  
So as the skies cry for  
fallen man, woman,  
child, beast, and  
greens  
The ground swells and the  
land slides,  
burying a village,  
the same one that

fought to save the  
thicket for fear of  
*just this.*  
Twenty-five dead, hundreds  
homeless  
And the soldiers march on  
Another day, another dozen  
dead for a dollar.  
Men, women, children, toiling  
in inhumane  
conditions  
For black rocks whose  
sediment will be  
their death within  
the decade  
In this land of no power,  
electrical or  
social  
For rocks of gold, silver,  
whatever else color  
for gems and metals  
It doesn't matter to them,  
it'll never be  
theirs  
Those gorgeous rocks will  
make their home

On the fingers of the wealthy  
     across seas or vast  
         expanses of land  
 From their home, from their  
     pain, from their  
         desperation  
 Missing limbs from cave-ins  
     and faces obscured  
     by a layer of dust  
 Mining under duress of  
     starvation, no  
     breaks for putrid  
     water, restless  
     sleep, rotten food,  
     or the unsanitary  
         bathroom  
 A child falls to his knees,  
     overworked, and is  
     left to die, crying  
     for his mother,  
         miles away.  
 The bodies fall like ashes  
     and I am scarred.

## Never Seen The Night

The child of only nine  
 Sits in a small pond, not  
     clear, but coated  
     in a film of all  
     colors, tinged with  
     a dark brown.  
 It is the morning hours,  
     perhaps just prior  
     to the crack of  
     dawn.  
 She doesn't know the meaning  
     of such words.  
 Neither because of education  
     or experience.  
  
 She lives in the Niger Delta  
 Once a lush land, green with  
     flora, home to  
     plenty of  
     creatures.  
 That is ancient history of  
     which she knows  
     none  
 Her family "lives" on a  
     couple hundred  
     dollars a year.  
 She likely is infected with  
     toxins they don't  
     know about  
 Her air is a smog, thick and  
     burning with  
     petrochemical  
     releases.  
  
 The land's strangest feature,  
     however, is it is a  
     land of never-  
     night.  
 In her nine years of  
     existence, she has  
     never once known  
     what night is.  
 Towering mini-sun spires of  
     blazing hot fire  
     jut from the ground  
     belching thousands  
     of degrees.  
 An eternal sunlight, night,  
     day, everyday.  
 Unlike the Arctic with six  
     months of day and

six of night, this  
land  
forgotten  
or  
ignored  
by the oil-hungry lands  
abroad  
is always in a perpetual  
daylight.

She's nine years old and has  
yet to see night  
Because night doesn't exist  
Night is simply another one  
of the rights  
She doesn't receive  
where she lives.

## A Kid, Four to Seven

*I don't know where I am*

*I am scared*

*There are more like me, here*

*What did I do?*

*Mom, where are you?*

*They beat those who don't obey,  
Obeying is beating those who don't obey.*

*They taught us how to shoot a gun  
By having us practice on others*

*I guess I'm the lucky one.*

*I first killed when I was five.*

*She, six, screamed for her life.*

*As I took my dull knife  
And ran it across her throat*

*I didn't feel bad about it.*

*Here I lie,*

*In a ditch*

*Seven years old*

*Six bullets in my back*

*Dead.*

4

5

6

7

## Fair Trade

I'm starving, my last meal  
was last Saturday.

I'm freezing, all I have is  
half a meter of  
cloth for a  
blanket.

I'm eight years old.

I have seven teeth, three  
black, one cracked.

I am almost legally blind,  
that's why I only  
have nine fingers.

Ten cents an hour, I work to  
help feed my  
family, my mother  
has

AIDS, my father died of an  
impacted wisdom  
tooth.

My little brother, four, has  
Down Syndrome.

My older sister is missing a  
leg from an  
accident that  
seasons your cup of  
coffee.

And that shirt you're

wearing? Under the  
black dye, is the  
blood from my now  
missing finger.

## Warzone

Tons of machinery making paths  
    where they choose  
Or where they're told  
Starving children left out in the  
    cold  
Fires consuming homes of the  
    innocent.  
Over totally unrelated provoking  
    incidents  
Gunfire taking down men, women,  
    children,  
    indiscriminately.  
Starvation, intimidation,  
    "salvation," poor  
    sanitation  
Isolation, conflagration,  
    incarceration, death.  
Good, honest people, trying to  
    live life,  
Under constant fear of whether or  
    not they will get to see  
    their homes again  
Their husbands, wives, children  
    again.  
Deemed infidels, marked for death,  
    on the basis of a cult  
    demanding respect  
Threats made in the names of gods.  
No true foundation for their  
    discrimination.

Locations destroyed, waste filling  
    the streets.  
While those on their 'mission'  
    just pass it by,  
Any chance of assistance  
    completely denied  
Ignorance, arrogance, militants,  
    dissonance,  
"Reverence," consequence,  
    vagrants, and fear.  
Yet those in charge don't shed a  
    tear,  
Calls for help, yet no one hears  
Until the day they disappear.  
Dehumanization of those different  
    from self.  
Placing values on a dusty shelf.  
Riches brought to rubble, science  
    blamed for trouble.  
Nobody is really safe anymore  
If this is city life, I'd hate to  
    go to war.

## Pre-Occupied

The youth are our future  
    youth are our future  
The lazy youth  
I fear for the future  
Need work experience  
Need work experience, for your  
first job  
Just get a job  
Just get a job  
Now hiring  
    Just not you.

Those occupiers  
Those lazy slobs, wanting free  
money  
    says the last social  
Security generation.  
Get a job  
    Lazy slob  
    lazy, wanting free money  
Just get a job.  
In my day, we weren't afraid to  
    roll up our sleeves or flip  
burgers.  
Get a degree so you don't have  
to flip burgers.  
Burger flippers failed the game  
of life  
PhDs flipping burgers  
because s/he needs a job  
To pay for loans  
    for the PhD  
Yes, I've graduated.  
No, they're not hiring  
Yes, I've applied.  
Yes, I'm trying.

That lazy youth  
Just get a job, stop asking for  
handouts.

I did my time, and what's the  
prize?  
Nothing but a piece of card  
stock in a frame, and ten years  
searching  
Yes, I'm trying.  
Since when is it lazy to feel  
let down, for not getting a job

in the field of the degree? The  
degree that took up a large  
fraction of my life?  
Yes I'm trying.  
No they're not hiring.

The youth are our future.  
To hell with the youth.

## Even More Homeless

He's only nine.  
He lives in a middle class  
house.  
But short of that, he's  
alone.  
He has parents, yes  
A mother and a father who  
Don't really care  
To them he's been nothing but  
A nine year burden they  
didn't want  
But had never gotten rid of.

Given the bare necessities  
for life  
He doesn't tell the kids at  
school  
who pick on him for his hair

His out-of-fashion clothes  
His height  
His weight

After the walk home he says a  
feeble

"hi mom, hi dad"

As he creeps his way up the  
stairs

Trying not to distract them  
from

More important things.

The TV channel changes.

His door closes.

He sits in his barren room at  
night

A bed (of sorts) and a table  
loosely

furnish the white box with  
cracked window.

He may have a house

But he's even more homeless  
than

The street citizens

The ones who have a community

Friends, even family  
Just no permanent residence.

He, nine,

He knows what it really means  
to be homeless.

He goes to the same place  
every night

But never feels like he is  
where

He should be.

Somewhere out there

There must be

A parent or two

Looking for a child

while he sits here

Looking

For a home.

## Six word Story:

### Poverty

kids play in an empty  
apartment.



## To Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

Hello, my number is 7996,  
I'm 5'5", weigh 95 lbs.  
And I'm selling my soul  
to sell my body  
to sell your goods on prime  
time commercials.  
who needs self esteem  
in light of the American  
Dream?  
The dream to be whatever you  
want to be  
As long as the price is  
right.

Hello, my number is 7996,  
I'm infected in mind,  
anorexic,  
So I can look good enough  
for the social standard  
You can see my heart through  
my  
ribcage, and the shape of my  
skull through my mascara and  
rouge face  
All this for just a taste  
Of acceptance.

Hello, my bed number is 7996  
As I sit here attached to  
machines,  
A victim of socially self-  
enforced self-destruction  
I lie here in this hospital  
room  
As a blanket is pulled across  
my face  
I may be gone  
but at least I died Pretty,  
Right?

## Words Like Bombs

Words, like bombs  
Can kill  
Have collateral damage  
Hurt  
Breed fear  
Control.

Don't think so?

Tell that to the innocent one in  
court, deemed guilty of a crime he  
didn't commit. When the court  
concludes the fit punishment is  
"death" for being in the wrong  
place at the wrong time.

Tell that to the countless groups  
who fought and still do for  
equality in the eyes de jure and  
de facto while those of the  
Bystander Effect keep walking, and  
those who would oppress  
keep talking.

Tell that to the victims of bill  
collectors. They were committed to  
paying and on time, then the  
economy happened. Now they stare  
blankly out the window, then to

their two year old, then back, to  
the pantry, empty, the street, the  
phone  
It rings.

words, like bombs  
Can destroy  
In an instant

And there's no turning back.  
The victims may recover  
May not, but once the detonator is  
pressed  
There's only moving forward.

words, like bombs  
Can change everything  
In an instant

Once it's done, it's done, and all  
that's left is  
The fallout  
Picking up the pieces  
The consequences experienced  
By the survivors

words, like bombs  
with shrapnel, sharp, stinging,  
piercing  
possibly permanently lodged within  
can bring immeasurable pain.

Words  
Like  
Bombs  
Can destroy

Sticks and stones:  
It's a lie.  
Words  
Like  
Bombs  
Are weapons.

## Ten People In Ten Sentences

The guy on the corner finds a  
crisis in getting a  
\$215 ticket for  
speeding.

A girl halfway around the  
world is  
celebrating being  
able to eat dinner  
tonight.

Some girl in a brand new SUV  
with a rhinestone

steering wheel  
cover is freaking  
out over not  
getting to go to a  
movie with her  
friend she sees  
every day.

A woman, right now, is  
thrilled she has a  
new skateboard on  
which to pull her  
legless body  
around.

Some three year old is  
screaming at his  
mom in a grocery  
store over coco  
crisps.

Some three year old is  
screaming for his  
mom dying of small  
pox.

A seven year old is not  
talking to her  
parents because she  
had her cell phone  
taken away.

A seven year old is feeding  
her family because  
she can't talk to  
her dead parents  
anymore.

A mother abuses her baby she  
irresponsibly had,  
but didn't want.

A gay man would do anything  
for a child he  
can't legally have.

## The Corner of Main and Ash

The second block of the main  
street of downtown,  
In front of the one-word-named-  
store that sells  
strange clothes, and stranger  
gadgets, run by a guy  
with  
No less than three piercings,  
with spiked hair,  
dyed green  
On the bench by the planter next  
to the newspaper  
machine  
Sits a guy on the guitar, trying  
to eke out a couple  
More dollars to pay for his  
girlfriend's ring  
He wants to propose on her  
birthday next month  
He sings, pours his heart into  
the words as his  
voice rings  
Guitar case open, filled with  
change, and a twenty  
clipped to the top in triumph of  
some kind stranger's

Generous gift to a guy in his  
shoes from not ten  
years previous  
Farther down the street, a man  
in rags with a sign  
Saying "Give me money" or  
something to that  
effect  
Unlike many in his situation, he  
didn't fall on tough  
times,  
He's fine, he just never tried  
and decides to  
Rely on the hearts and kindness  
of hard-working  
Fools who think he's unable to  
work for his food  
He lives off of free, a strong  
willed greed, not  
caring  
If he ever lives in a mansion,  
so long as he never  
has to work for his  
green  
In the alley nearby is some poor  
guy with a spell so  
bad he can't get  
hired,

For even the simplest of jobs  
because he can't  
control  
His actions, he stares at night  
and shivers from  
chills,  
How he'd love to have the  
simplest skills, he'd  
get a job  
If he could, but everything so  
far is no good,  
He pains from the cruelty of the  
previously mentioned  
A miser, lazy, exploiting  
attention, making his  
life  
Harder since he can't do  
anything but this guy  
makes  
Cash by shyster-like begging

## Gambling His Life Away

I'm Gus,  
Yesterday I brought my teeth  
into the neck of  
another, like me  
She didn't have a chance, her  
body was worn out  
from over breeding,  
her teeth pulled  
out  
I did it out of mercy as she  
whined a painful  
thank you release  
Just two years ago life was  
good, my kid, I  
think his name was  
Jake,  
Let me out for an afternoon  
run,  
Next thing I know I'm in this  
pit, just trying to  
survive,  
To pad the pockets of some  
person who doesn't  
care about me,  
Doesn't feed me, doesn't  
value me,

Doesn't value life,  
Tomorrow I'll be tossed in  
the garbage, like  
she was yesterday,  
with her, unborn litter they  
didn't realize she  
had.

I miss you Jake.

### Where They Go To Die

"Say bye bye to grandma"  
The last words I heard from  
my daughter  
As she left me in this place  
Forgotten by God  
I haven't seen my family in  
four years  
That wouldn't be a problem if  
that were all  
But the nurse  
If you can call him that  
He finds some sick  
entertainment in  
Hitting me, unable to walk

Of my own accord, then labels  
it a fall and escapes

The last I saw of my great  
grandchildren was yesterday  
They visit often, but never  
me, alive, again  
For last night, a nurse, mad  
at her husband,  
Took our her rage on my frail  
frame  
Smothered me with a pillow,  
if she wasn't going  
to see her kids again, she  
figured, I shouldn't either.

we, alone, are where we all  
end up,  
Back in the Earth, before our  
time,  
we went willingly to the  
homes,  
Not wanting to burden our  
families,  
But they will never know,  
what truly happened.

## Who Can Parent A Child

Murderers  
Molesters  
Rapists  
The clinically insane  
Drug addicts  
Abusers  
Violent maniacs  
Irresponsible parents who  
leave the knives out  
Homeless people who don't  
want to work  
who claim the kids just for  
the perks  
A mother who has 15 other  
biological kids, only three  
from the same father  
who wants help paying for  
them  
Even those willing to  
brainwash

... You know, as long as  
they're not gay.

## Condemned to Death

she was told  
she was bad  
she was broken  
she was an abomination  
she wasn't qualified to be a  
parent  
she was confused  
she deserved death  
  
she took it  
she killed herself  
  
Because she felt bad  
Because she felt broken  
Because she felt like an  
abomination  
Because she felt unqualified  
to be a parent  
Because she felt confused  
Because she was gay

## Academic Misconduct

Academic stronghold with a  
sports mascot face  
with a sports budget  
with a sports section in the  
newspaper  
where athletes are first class  
and ahead of scholars and  
aesthetes  
where people come to better  
include athletes so they don't  
feel alienated.

while...

There is education, yes, but  
In some departments  
Second to research, while  
teaching assistants are the  
sole educators and graders  
students there to learn are  
fourth class  
Below Alumni (who donate or  
succeed in the university's  
honor, of course)  
sports fans  
And the aforementioned athletes  
But the athletes are alienated.  
Not we, here to learn, and  
heaven forbid you say you don't  
*follow* sports  
Or you may as well hide your  
face

Disgrace

This campus with white walls and  
red rooves  
and students and students and  
students and students and  
*students* and some athletes, too  
-- who are students.  
Divide the time and money and  
students pay scores above sports  
Enroll later, no financial  
support  
Guaranteed.

where:

Debate teams win national awards  
on the back page of the paper  
because our  
Basketball team  
*Lost* a game, and that's news.  
Academia at odds with its  
institution  
But few care  
And fewer speak out  
Because challenge the system and  
you're a heretic  
Who goes to school to learn?

I DO DAMNIT.

So give me a sign that I mean  
something to the place  
That took  
Four years and  
Forty thousand dollars  
And gave me a piece of card  
stock with a seal.  
Maybe.

If that card stock is not too  
much to ask, that is.

## How To Fix Things

Don't pray for me

Don't pray for change

Don't pray for peace

Don't pray for truth

Look for truth

Strive for peace

work for change

Think for *yourself*